

YAM-BITIOUS RESEARCHER

– NOT FOR FAME, BUT TO GLOW IN LIFE



Distinguished
Alumna

What essentially made a metal complex or a molecular material luminous? This question not only referred to the subject with which Professor Vivian Wing-Wah YAM had been heavily involved in the past decades, but also to herself, who shined in the glory of her achievements.

Professor Yam spent nearly all of her academic career in HKU and became a Faculty member since 1990, Professor (Reader) in 1997, and Chair Professor in 1999 in the nurturing grounds she was in; and since became a Professor, she received numerous awards and countless titles from the scientific community in acknowledgement of her accomplishments and contributions. Some examples would be the election to Member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences in 2001 as the youngest member of the CAS, Laureate of L'ORÉAL-UNESCO For Women in Science Award (Asia-Pacific) in 2011 and election to Foreign Associate of the National Academy of Science USA in 2012.

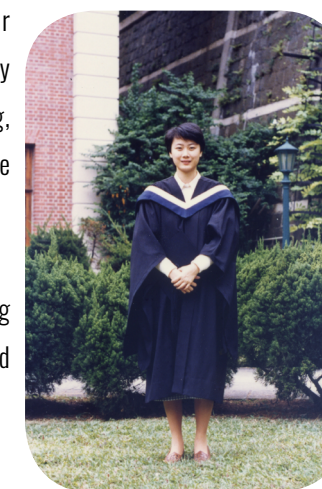
Before the pile of won awards stood the Chong Yuet Ming Chemistry Building. "With the more modernised research infrastructure at that time, I can concentrate solely on my work."

Yet before the Chong Yuet Ming Chemistry Building, there was the Hui Pun Hing Chemistry Building.

"I miss that front lawn of the Hui Pun Hing Chemistry Building,"

said Professor Yam, "that was the standard spot for graduation photo. You can ask anyone and I am certain they would feel the same way." While she further described the Hui Pun Hing Chemistry Building with nostalgia, which was the old chemistry building, Yam brushed her hands along the virtually pictured outline of the building, projecting a hologram of the beloved building onto thin air.

Nevertheless, the old building was not the only thing she had strong feeling about.



Up until the early 90s, research assistants and state-of-the-art equipment were rarer than diamonds due to scarce funding. Besides, while it typically took only three days for the ordered chemicals to arrive in laboratories around America, deliveries taking three months were considered as quick for shipments to Hong Kong. Given the circumstances, those conducting research in Hong Kong were seemed to be at a disadvantage. Yet many researchers including Professor Yam stayed in their positions against all odds.

"Conducting research under harsh circumstances and environments is our tradition," she let out a quick chuckle before continuing, "It is what the previous generation of professors did, and it gives us no excuse to bail out from any challenges." as she withdrew her smile and clasped her hands together.



Logically, it was tempting for the public to believe that HKU would be unsuited for academic research under such conditions. "Our inferiority compared to famous overseas universities is nothing but a false portrayal," Professor Yam argued in a slightly raised voice. Evidently, she came to such realisation through personal experience. Thanks to the support of numerous scholarships such as from the Croucher Foundation which was greatly appreciated, Professor Yam once visited several UK and US universities while she was still a fresh doctoral graduate, hoping to gain exposure and to learn from them. "On a number of occasions, (foreign) senior post-doctorate researchers came to consult me. I didn't realise how splendid the training provided by HKU was until I visited other colleges."

When asked to pick the achievement which was paramount to her, Professor Yam replied "The opportunity to demonstrate your own idea and the creation of a trending field for new research are notable achievements on its own. Awards are just a bonus." To her research was not stepping stone to gain fame and fortune, research was not even a job; it was part of her life, by which she could enjoy the process and the freedom of mind.

For the luminescent materials Professor Yam invented, a beam of light must first be shined or a supply of electrical voltage be applied on the material to initiate the glow. Similarly, to trigger the rise of an excellent researcher required a brilliant institute to supply power.

STUDENT REPORTER

"It was a rare and fruitful experience to interview an incredibly credible scholar. The mentality and approach to different aspects of life I learnt from Professor Yam deem inspirational."



Alex Chan, BSc Student
(major in Physics)

Major Achievements

- Philip Wong Wilson Wong Professor in Chemistry and Energy & Chair Professor at HKU
- Member of the Chinese Academy of Sciences
- Foreign Associate of the US National Academy of Sciences
- Foreign Member of Academia Europaea
- Fellow of The World Academy of Sciences (TWAS)
- Founding Member of The Academy of Sciences of Hong Kong
- Laureate of the 2011 L'Oréal-UNESCO For Women in Science Award

"Constantly seek improvement. Otherwise, we degrade."